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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002232

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [MARR](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: DEFENSE SECRETARY ON DISASTER RELIEF, ARMED  
FORCES, PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: A. MANILA 2071 (UPDATE ON FATAL IED ATTACK)  
[1](#)B. MANILA 1988 (RULING COALITION SELECTS TEODORO)  
[1](#)C. MANILA 2218 (ESTRADA ANNOUNCES PRESIDENTIAL RUN)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a private October 22 breakfast meeting with the Ambassador, Philippine Defense Secretary and ruling party presidential candidate Gilberto Teodoro praised U.S. disaster relief assistance, requested reconstruction funds, and described the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) as stretched thin with conflict in Mindanao and relief efforts across Luzon. He said he had not begun his presidential campaign in earnest, having neither hired a campaign manager nor raised significant funds. Teodoro has been an excellent Defense Secretary and a good friend of the United States; however, lagging in the polls, he will need to engage fully in the campaign if he is to have any hope of catching his rivals. End summary.

#### Disaster Relief

[1](#)2. (C) In a one-on-one breakfast meeting with the Ambassador on October 22, Secretary of National Defense Teodoro said that he is very pleased with U.S. assistance in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Ketsana and Typhoon Parma, and effusively praised the tireless relief efforts of U.S. military forces participating in the Talon Vision PHIBLEX exercise -- particularly members of Third Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) -- and the superb coordinating role of the Mission's Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG). He said that helicopters provided by the United Nations are now playing a critical role, and that Japan is helpfully supplying fuel for the flights. Teodoro said that, even as the government prepares for the arrival of Typhoon Lupit, they are turning their attention to the reconstruction effort and would appreciate U.S. funding for these long-term projects.

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador thanked Teodoro for his kind words regarding the III MEF and JUSMAG and noted that USAID and others had also made major contributions. She said that we have done contingency planning for Lupit and believe that the most likely need would be for U.S. airlift and medical assistance. Those assets are currently in the Philippines participating in Talon Vision PHIBLEX and we are delaying their departure. Regarding reconstruction, the Ambassador said, USAID will likely help with projects such as education, but it is the multilateral development banks that normally provide the vast majority of the funds for large-scale reconstruction.

#### Armed Forces In Demand

[1](#)4. (C) Teodoro said that the AFP is "stretched thin" in confronting disaster relief in addition to armed groups in

Jolo and, in this light, it is very helpful that the ceasefire with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is holding. He is closely following the investigation into the September 28 IED attack that killed two U.S. and one Filipino servicemen (Ref A). Teodoro discussed internal AFP dynamics at some length, noting that he did not agree with Western Mindanao Commander Maj. Gen. Dolorfino's decision to attack rogue armed groups on Jolo on the eve of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr. In contrast, Bg. Gen. Guerrero, Dolorfino's commander on Jolo, is doing a good job. He said that Lt. Gen. Bangit, who is likely to be named Chief of Staff soon, is a good officer who receives some unwarranted criticism. At the same time, Teodoro said that he is concerned that Bangit will put undeserving members of his Philippine Military Academy (PMA) class into key positions. Turning back to Jolo, Teodoro said that the overall situation on the island remains very difficult and that, if elected president, he would put a high priority on making progress there and throughout Mindanao.

#### Presidential Campaign

15. (C) Teodoro, who was named the ruling Lakas-Kampi-CMD coalition's candidate last month (Ref B), said that his presidential campaign has not begun in earnest -- despite the fact the election is only seven months away. He has been occupied with his work as Chairman of the National Disaster Coordinating Council, and President Arroyo has been keeping him busy with a variety of tasks. Teodoro said that he had not yet named a manager or filled many other staff positions for his campaign.

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16. (C) Teodoro was optimistic that he would be able to raise funds, saying that the big donors normally contribute to all of the major candidates. He is hopeful that business tycoon Danding Cojuangco (who is also his uncle) will come through with a large donation but said, cryptically, that he is not willing to "cut a deal" to ensure the financial support. Teodoro viewed former President Joseph Estrada as competing for votes primarily with Senator Manuel "Manny" Villar. Although Teodoro is viewed as a hawk on the southern insurgency, he denigrated Estrada's call for an "all-out war" on Mindanao as "outrageous" (Ref C).

17. (C) Teodoro said that, despite public expectations that Interior and Local Government Secretary Ronaldo Puno would be his running mate, Puno instead would likely reprise the role he had played successfully for other candidates in the past, as a campaign adviser. Teodoro's other options for VP could include President Arroyo's political advisor Gabriel Claudio (but, Teodoro said, he is easily manipulated); Senators Francis Escudero or Loren Legarda (both of whom may seek the Nationalist People's Coalition presidential nomination, and have ranked ahead of Teodoro in the polls); Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia; and Senator Miguel Zubiri.

#### Comment

18. (C) Teodoro has devoted his full energy and attention to the exhaustive disaster relief efforts, receiving substantial public exposure. Yet it is revealing that in the midst of disaster relief and a presidential campaign, Teodoro stressed to the Ambassador his disappointment that he could not travel to the Golan Heights to participate in a ceremony for the Philippine peacekeeping troops there, a personal interest of his. Such comments and the slow pace of campaign organization raise the question whether Teodoro, who said that he will only seek the presidency once, is ambivalent about running for President. While Teodoro is intellectually gifted and the scion of an influential family, he appears easily distracted so far from doing the kind of hard campaigning -- and hard deal-making -- needed to get elected

president.  
KENNEY